



**F A B L E S** 78

WILLINGHAM BUCKINGHAM PEPOY GROSS

SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

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**VERTIGO**

JAN 09



**I**N THE FORMER  
EMPIRE WORLD  
OF TIABRUT...

SO,  
NIMBLE  
MISTER  
MOUSE AND  
STALWART MISTER  
FREDDY CAME IN  
SEARCH OF  
TREASURE AND  
SPOILS.

BUT  
WHAT DID  
THEY  
FIND?

WELL, I'M  
VALUABLE ENOUGH,  
THOUGH IT REMAINS TO  
BE SEEN IF YOU'LL  
CONSIDER ME MUCH  
OF A TREASURE.

AND I'M  
MOST CERTAINLY  
NOT SPOILED, EVEN  
THOUGH I'VE BEEN  
COOPED UP IN  
THIS CRAMPED  
AND DREARY  
STONE BOX FOR  
AN AWFUL  
LONG TIME.



# BOXES



## Chapter Two of THE DARK AGES



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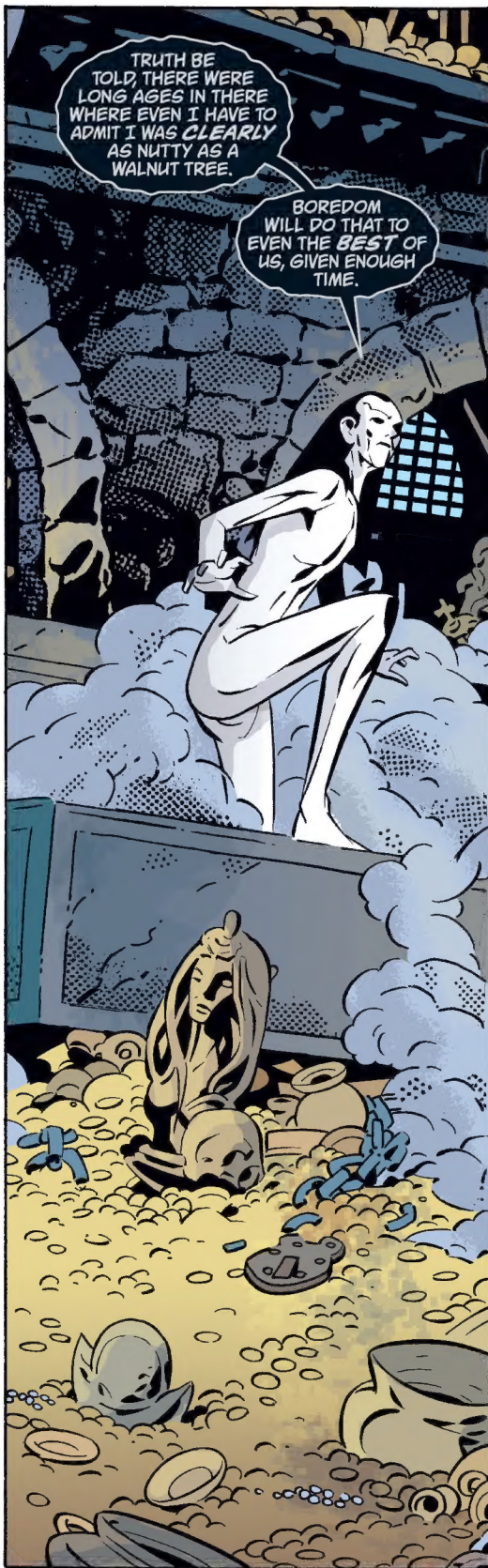
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TRUTH BE TOLD, THERE WERE LONG AGES IN THERE WHERE EVEN I HAVE TO ADMIT I WAS CLEARLY AS NUTTY AS A WALNUT TREE.

BOREDOM WILL DO THAT TO EVEN THE BEST OF US, GIVEN ENOUGH TIME.

ARE WE STILL USING THAT IDIOM, BY THE WAY? NUTTY? GOOD. I SO HATE TO BE OUT OF DATE.

OH, DEAR ME. LOOK HOW UNDER-DRESSED I AM. WE MUST REMEDY THAT IMMEDIATELY, AS MY NATURAL POWER BEGINS TO FLOW BACK INTO ME FROM ALL OF ITS WAYWARD SOURCES.



RETURN, RETURN, FROM FIELDS FAR BEYOND THESE CORRUPTED LANDS! OH, HOW THEY LEACHED IT OUT OF ME OVER THE YEARS.

BUT EVERY PRODIGAL MUST COME HOME AT LAST. THAT'S THE INESCAPABLE NATURE OF THINGS, EVEN IN THE SUPER-NATURE. THE RIVER REVERSES COURSE. MY POWER RETURNS!



WHAT'S THAT, SIR? I'VE NOT YET INTRODUCED MYSELF? WHERE ARE MY MANNERS? YOU WERE SO CORRECT TO SCOLD ME!

I'VE HAD SO MANY NAMES OVER THE AGES, AND LIKELY WILL HAVE MANY MORE IN TIME, BUT WHY DON'T YOU JUST CALL ME MISTER DARK, HMMMM?

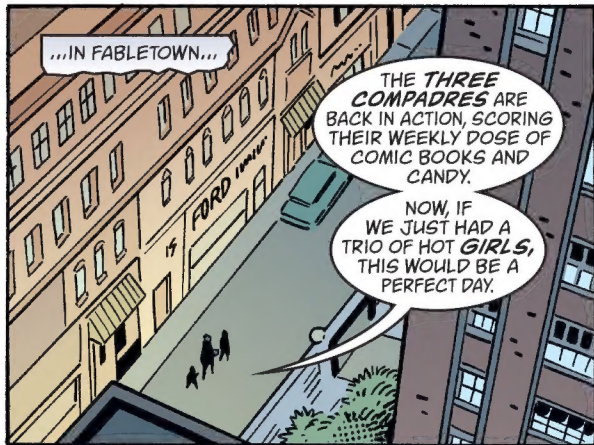
THAT'S A NAME TO FIT ANY AGE, AND SHOULD DO SPLENDIDLY, DON'T YOU THINK?





MEANWHILE...

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES, HUH?



...IN FABLETOWN...

THE THREE COMPADRES ARE BACK IN ACTION, SCORING THEIR WEEKLY DOSE OF COMIC BOOKS AND CANDY.

NOW, IF WE JUST HAD A TRIO OF HOT *GIRLS*, THIS WOULD BE A PERFECT DAY.



BOOKS

HEY, I GOT AN IDEA! WHY DON'T WE HOOK UP WITH THOSE THREE *ARABIAN* HOTTIES THAT MOVED IN SINCE I WAS LAST HERE?

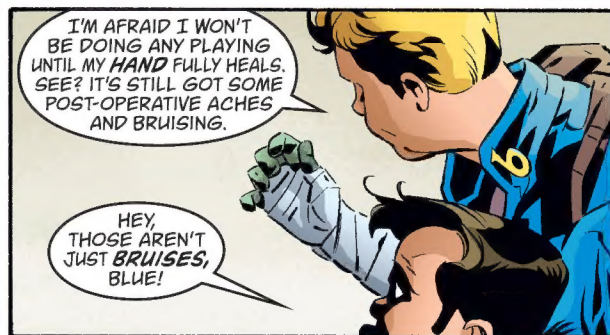
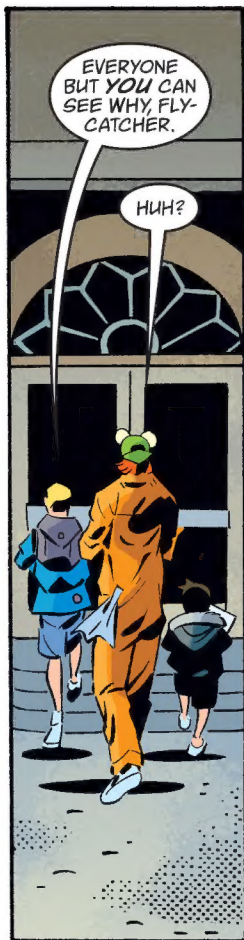
THEY'VE CERTAINLY GOT ALL SORTS OF *VA-VA-VOOM!* THEY'VE GOT MORE WIGGLES THAN A FLOCK OF MONGOOSE, IF YOU CATCH MY MEANING.

OR IS IT *MONGEES?*

I CAN'T DO THAT, PINOCCHIO. RIDING HOOD SAYS I'M NOT ALLOWED TO *SPEAK* TO THEM ANYMORE. I'M NOT SURE WHY.

I'M SURE WHY.







fAR, FAR AWAY...

NO, I DON'T THINK SO. WHY SHOULD I HELP THE TWO OF YOU GATHER TREASURE? I DON'T NEED IT AND YOU SHOULDN'T COVET IT.

GREED IS A DEADLY SIN, MY FRIENDS.

BESIDES, I HAVE MY OWN WORRIES TO ATTEND TO. I HAVE TO GET BACK WHAT WAS TAKEN FROM ME.

WELL, YES, OF COURSE MY POWER'S RETURNING TO ME ON ITS OWN. ONCE OUT OF THE BOX, THAT MUCH WAS AUTOMATIC.

I'D NEVER LIE TO YOU—NOT AFTER WE'VE COME TO MEAN SO MUCH TO EACH OTHER IN SUCH A SHORT TIME.

BUT SOME OF THE ESSENTIAL ME WAS STOLEN AND BOUND UP INTO A WITCHING CLOAK—A TREACHEROUS BIT OF CLOTH AND STITCHING THAT WAS CRAFTED TO MIMIC MY NATURAL GIFTS.

I NEED TO UNRAVEL THAT WICKED THING AND PUNISH THOSE WHO MADE USE OF IT, DON'T I? ALL THINGS NEED TO BE SET RIGHT, DON'T THEY?



**I**N FABLETOWN...

EVEN THOUGH YOU'VE CUT OFF MY ABILITY TO CONJURE, I STILL HAVE **CONNECTIONS** IN PLACE TO MY OLD EMPIRE.

I CAN SENSE WHEN CERTAIN THINGS HAVE BEEN DISRUPTED, AND THEY HAVE. ONE OF THE **BROADCAST BOXES** HAS BEEN OPENED.

AND WHAT MIGHT THEY BE?

AH, SO YOU DON'T KNOW **EVERYTHING**, DO YOU?

THE BOXES WERE USED TO POWER MY **SORCERERS CORPS** BY BROADCASTING WHATEVER MAGICAL SOURCE WAS CONTAINED WITHIN.

ONE OR MORE PER WORLD WOULD BE ENOUGH TO SUPPLY--

WELL, SUFFICE IT TO SAY, THEY CONTAIN GREAT OLD POWERS. NOW AT LEAST **ONE** OF THOSE OLD POWERS HAS BEEN RELEASED BACK INTO THE WORLDS.

YOU **SERIOUSLY** OVERSTEPPED IN DESTROYING MY EMPIRE. BY ANY MEASURE, WE **SOLVED** MORE PROBLEMS THAN WE CREATED.

SOMETHING THAT TOOK CENTURIES AND ENTIRE ARMIES TO SAFELY LOCK AWAY IS LOOSE AGAIN AND YOU CAUSED IT.

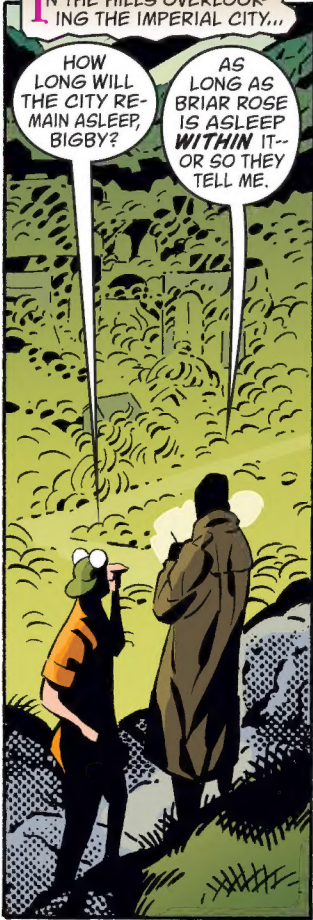
I WONDER HOW LONG WE'LL BE ABLE TO SURVIVE THE RESULTS OF YOUR NOBLE **MEDDLING**.



IN THE HILLS OVERLOOKING THE IMPERIAL CITY...

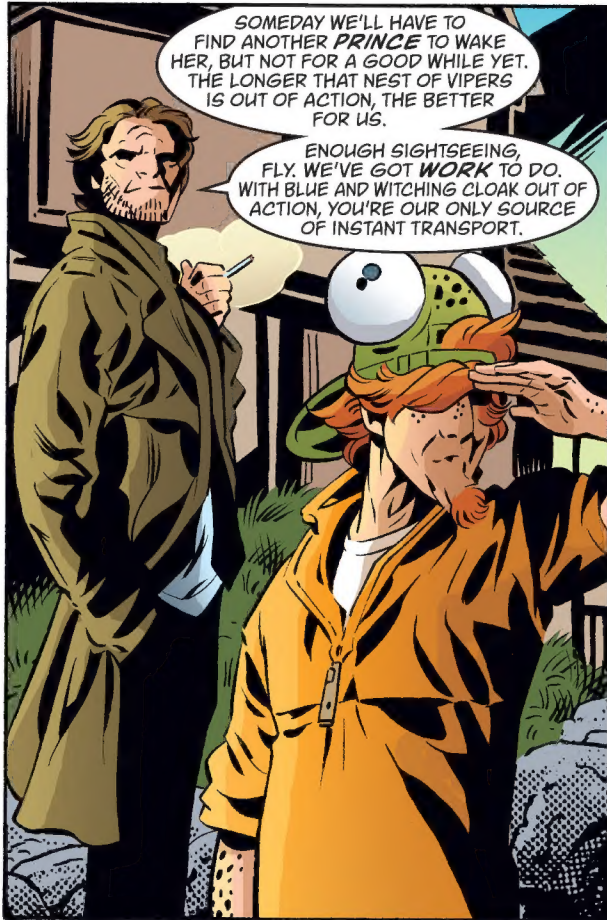
HOW LONG WILL THE CITY REMAIN ASLEEP, BIGBY?

AS LONG AS BRIAR ROSE IS ASLEEP WITHIN IT--OR SO THEY TELL ME.



SOMEDAY WE'LL HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER PRINCE TO WAKE HER, BUT NOT FOR A GOOD WHILE YET. THE LONGER THAT NEST OF VIPERS IS OUT OF ACTION, THE BETTER FOR US.

ENOUGH SIGHTSEEING, FLY. WE'VE GOT WORK TO DO. WITH BLUE AND WITCHING CLOAK OUT OF ACTION, YOU'RE OUR ONLY SOURCE OF INSTANT TRANSPORT.



SEEMS ODD MY ORDERING AROUND A GREAT KING AND ALL. YOU DON'T MIND, DO YOU?

NO, OF COURSE NOT, BUT YOU'RE RIGHT. WE SHOULD HURRY. I WANT TO GET BACK TO THE HOSPITAL AND LOOK IN ON BLUE.



HERE IT IS. THIS HAS TO BE THE BOX TOTENKINDER DESCRIBED.

IT'S CERTAINLY HEAVY ENOUGH.



READY TO GO, BIGBY?

SURE. TAKE US HOME, FLY--BUT DIRECTLY INTO TOTENKINDER'S APARTMENT. SHE DOESN'T WANT ANYONE TO SEE THIS ARRIVE.





**I**N THE TIABRUT  
TREASURE  
FORTRESS...

WHAT DO  
YOU MEAN? YOU  
IMAGINE SOMEONE  
MIGHT HAVE BECOME  
SO DEFT WITH THE  
WITCHING CLOAK SO  
AS TO ACTUALLY  
USE IT AGAINST  
ME?

CERTAINLY  
IT'S A POSSIBILITY,  
BUT IS IT LIKELY?

OH, OF  
COURSE YOU'D  
THINK SO, MISTER  
MOUSE. YOU'RE  
EVER  
THE PESSIMIST.

STILL...

ENOUGH! ENOUGH!  
QUIT YOUR NAGGING. WHEN  
YOU'RE RIGHT, YOU'RE RIGHT.  
BETTER TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS  
NOW THAN TO SUFFER  
REGRETS LATER.

BUT UNBINDING  
THE THING FROM SO FAR  
AWAY WILL BE DIFFICULT. WHO  
KNOWS WHAT ELSE NEARBY  
WILL COME ALL UNBOUND  
WITH IT?

BECAUSE IT'S  
HARD TO AIM A SPELL THIS  
POWERFUL, THAT'S WHY! CAN YOU  
PLACE AN ARROW WITHIN AN EYE'S-  
WIDTH MARK FROM OVER TWO  
HUNDRED YARDS  
DISTANT?

YOU CAN?  
WELL, AREN'T  
YOU THE FINE  
MARKSMAN.  
BUT THIS IS  
STILL MUCH  
HARDER.

I HAVE  
TO PERFORM  
MY WORKING  
FROM UNTOLD  
WORLDS DISTANT,  
WHICH IS  
WHY YOUR  
INSIPID LITTLE  
ALLEGORY  
FAILS AS A  
FAIR COMPAR-  
ISON.

A  
DIFFERENCE  
OF DEGREE IS A  
DIFFERENCE  
OF KIND.

YOU  
DID SO BRING  
IT UP! I CLEARLY  
HEARD YOU, AND  
FREDDY HEARD  
YOU TOO!



A FEW HOURS LATER...



WHAT'S THIS?



THE WITCHING CLOAK. YOU ASKED ME TO FETCH IT.

YOU SAID DOCTOR SWINEHEART NEEDED IT DOWN AT THE INFIRMARY--SOMETHING TO DO WITH BLUE'S LATEST OPERATION.

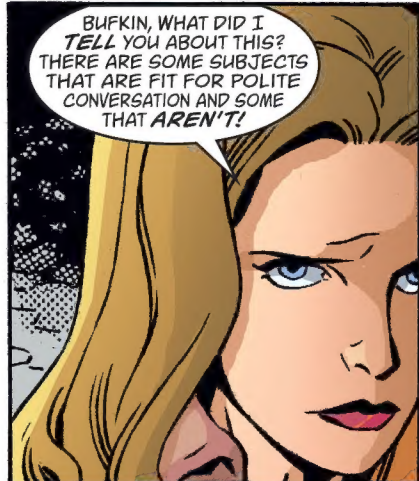
I DID. HE DOES. BUT WHAT'S THAT IN YOUR HANDS? THOSE ARE OLD RAGS.

IT WAS THE CLOAK WHEN I PICKED IT UP! HONEST!



BUT THEN IT SORT OF CAME ALL APART WHEN I GRABBED IT! AND NOT ONLY THAT, I SUDDENLY HAD TO POOP REALLY BAD, AND NOW THERE'S A BIG MESS BACK IN THE--

NOT-- ANOTHER-- WORD!



BUFKIN, WHAT DID I TELL YOU ABOUT THIS? THERE ARE SOME SUBJECTS THAT ARE FIT FOR POLITE CONVERSATION AND SOME THAT AREN'T!



YOUR BATHROOM HABITS BELONG STRICTLY IN THE SECOND CATEGORY!

BUT, MISS BEAUTY, THIS WASN'T THE USUAL POOP! IT WAS ALL WET AND MESSY AND EXPLOSIVE EVEN! IT'S SPLATTERED EVERYWHERE!



RRRUUMMMMBLE!

BEAUTY!

WHAT ARE YOU--?

I DIDN'T MEAN TO--!

I'M SORRY!

I'LL NEVER TALK ABOUT POOP AGAIN!

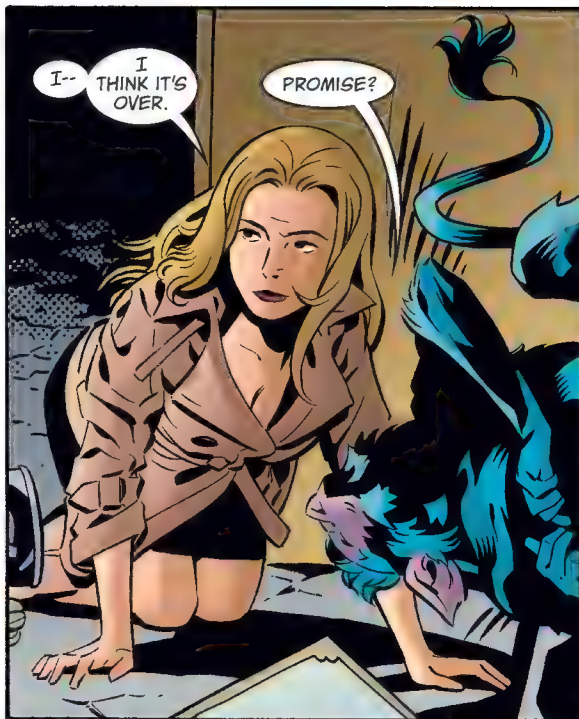
JUST MAKE IT STOP!

PLEASE MAKE IT STOP!

WHAT THE HELL--?!

I'M NOT DOING IT, YOU IMBECILE! I THINK WE'RE HAVING AN EARTHQUAKE!





I-- I THINK IT'S OVER.

PROMISE?



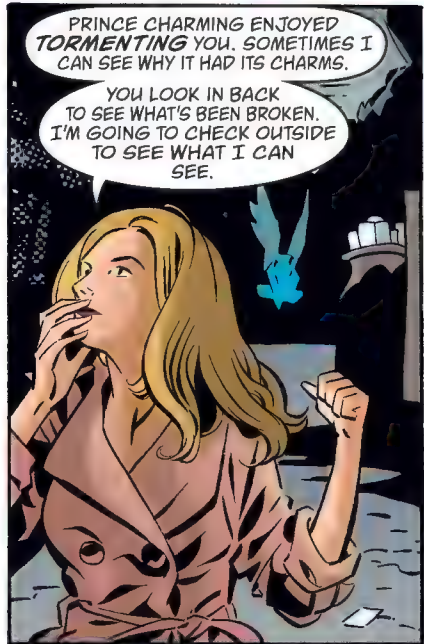
HOW WOULD I KNOW? I'VE NEVER BEEN THROUGH AN EARTHQUAKE BEFORE. SINCE WHEN DOES NEW YORK EVEN HAVE THEM?



I MEANT, DO YOU PROMISE YOU DIDN'T CAUSE THIS BECAUSE YOU'RE MAD AT ME?

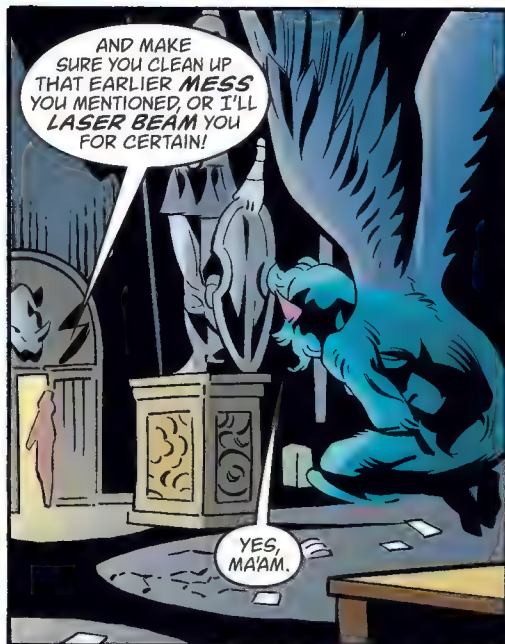
DON'T BE DAFT. I DON'T HAVE THOSE KINDS OF POWERS.

REALLY? BUT PRINCE CHARMING (MAY HE REST IN PEACE) ALWAYS SAID YOU DID! HE SAID YOU COULD BURN MY HEART OUT WITH YOUR LASER BEAM EYES!



PRINCE CHARMING ENJOYED TORMENTING YOU. SOMETIMES I CAN SEE WHY IT HAD ITS CHARMS.

YOU LOOK IN BACK TO SEE WHAT'S BEEN BROKEN. I'M GOING TO CHECK OUTSIDE TO SEE WHAT I CAN SEE.



AND MAKE SURE YOU CLEAN UP THAT EARLIER MESS YOU MENTIONED, OR I'LL LASER BEAM YOU FOR CERTAIN!

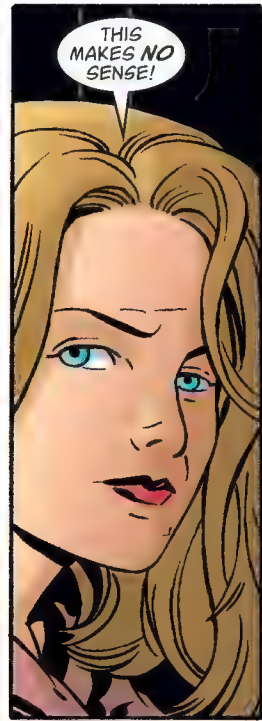
YES, MAAM.





WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "NOTHING HAPPENED"? I SWEAR THE WHOLE DAMNED BUILDING SHOOK, NOT FIVE MINUTES AGO!

NOT OUT HERE. MAYBE YOU DREAMED IT?



THIS MAKES *NO* SENSE!



"I WASN'T DREAMING, GRIMBLE! I WASN'T EVEN ASLEEP! *YOU'RE* THE ONE WHO NAPS THE DAY AWAY!"

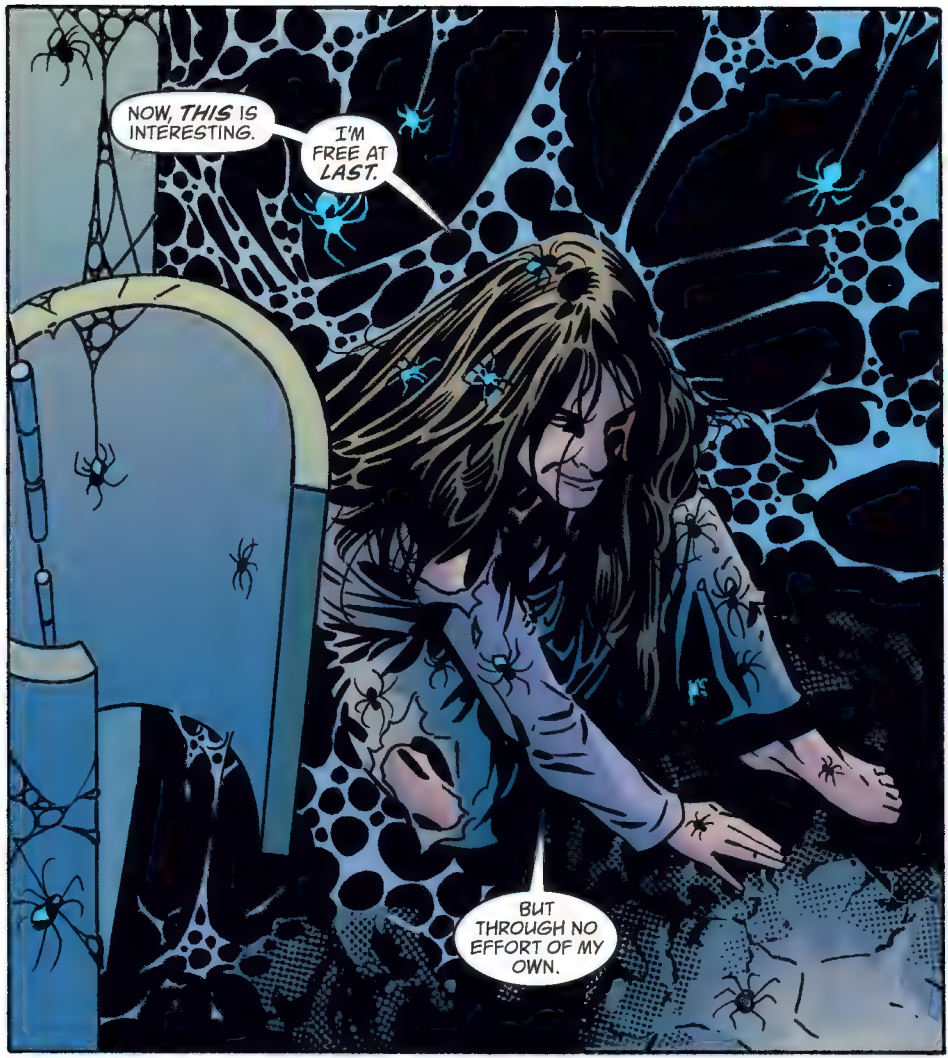


"I *DEMAND* THAT YOU GET OFF YOUR ASS AND SEE IF ANYONE ELSE NOTICED THE EARTHQUAKE!"



"YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE THE WOODLAND'S SECURITY OFFICER, SO *ACT* LIKE IT! CHECK TO SEE IF WE'RE SECURE!"





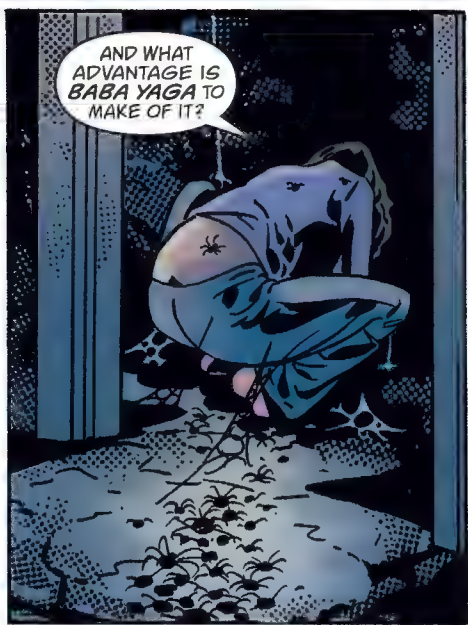
NOW, *THIS* IS INTERESTING.

I'M FREE AT LAST.

BUT THROUGH NO EFFORT OF MY OWN.



WHO, THEN, CAUSED THIS FORTUNATE TURN?



AND WHAT ADVANTAGE IS *BABA YAGA* TO MAKE OF IT?



AND JUST OUTSIDE  
THE WOODLAND  
BUILDING...

HEY,  
BROOME? DOES  
THIS COFFIN FEEL  
TOO LIGHT?

WELL,  
THERE'S NO ONE  
IN IT.

CAREFUL  
NOT TO **SCRAPE**  
IT, THOUGH. IT'S GOT  
TO BE PERFECT FOR  
THE MEMORIAL.

SO WE'RE  
JUST GOING TO  
BURY AN EMPTY BOX?  
SOMEHOW THAT DOESN'T  
SEEM--Y'KNOW--  
ENOUGH.

NOT ENTIRELY  
EMPTY. THERE'LL BE ONE  
OF CHARMING'S UNIFORMS  
INSIDE, SOME OF HIS FAVOR-  
ITE SWORDS AND A **SHIT-**  
LOAD OF HIS MEDALS.

UH, MISS BEAUTY? CAN  
WE **HELP** YOU WITH  
SOMETHING?

NO SHAKEN  
BUILDINGS? NO RUMBLING?  
NOTHING? YOU DIDN'T SEE  
OR HEAR A THING?

EXCUSE  
ME?

NEVER  
MIND. **CARRY  
ON!**

WHAT  
AN ODD  
WOMAN.

PRETTY  
THOUGH.

TRUE.  
THAT MAKES  
UP FOR A  
LOT.



AT THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA HOSPITAL...

THE GOOD NEWS IS THE OPERATION WAS FULLY SUCCESSFUL THIS TIME. ONE HUNDRED PERCENT **GUARANTEED**.



AND HERE'S THE CULPRIT.

REMEMBER HOW, NO MATTER WHAT I DID, IT SEEMED WE WERE **MISSING** SOMETHING? NO, DON'T TRY TO ANSWER. YOU'RE STILL TOO WEAK.



I KNEW WE GOT ALL OF THE ARROW, BUT WE KEPT MISSING **THIS**.



A TINY PIECE OF **THREAD** FROM THE WITCHING CLOAK.



ALMOST INVISIBLE, IT WAS SO SMALL. I HAD THE DEVIL'S OWN TIME FINDING IT.

IT WAS THIS THAT WAS CORRUPTING YOUR WOUND ALL ALONG-- NOT THE ARROW. GOT LODGED DEEP IN ONE MUSCLE. IT'S **INCREDIBLY MAGICAL!**





IMAGINE, JUST ONE SMALL THREAD CAUSING ALL THAT DAMAGE!

NOT TO WORRY, THOUGH. I THINK WE CAUGHT IT IN TIME. YOU SHOULD RECOVER FINE NOW.

MY ARM FEELS FUNNY, THOUGH.



NO IT DOESN'T. THAT'S PHANTOM PAIN. I HAD TO AMPUTATE YOUR ARM, OF COURSE. THAT'S THE BAD NEWS, I GUESS.

NO OTHER WAY TO REALLY GET IN THERE AND DIG AROUND FOR WHAT WAS TRYING SO HARD TO KILL YOU.



NOT ENOUGH OF YOUR ARM LEFT INTACT AFTER THAT TO ATTEMPT TO REATTACH. MOST OF IT ROTTED WITH GANGRENE.

MAYBE I SHOULD'VE TRIED, THOUGH. I AM, AFTER ALL, THE GREATEST MILITARY SURGEON IN HISTORY. THAT WOULD'VE BEEN ONE FOR THE RECORD BOOKS, HMM?



YOU REST UP, NOW, BOY BLUE. I HAVE TO GO WRITE UP MY NOTES.



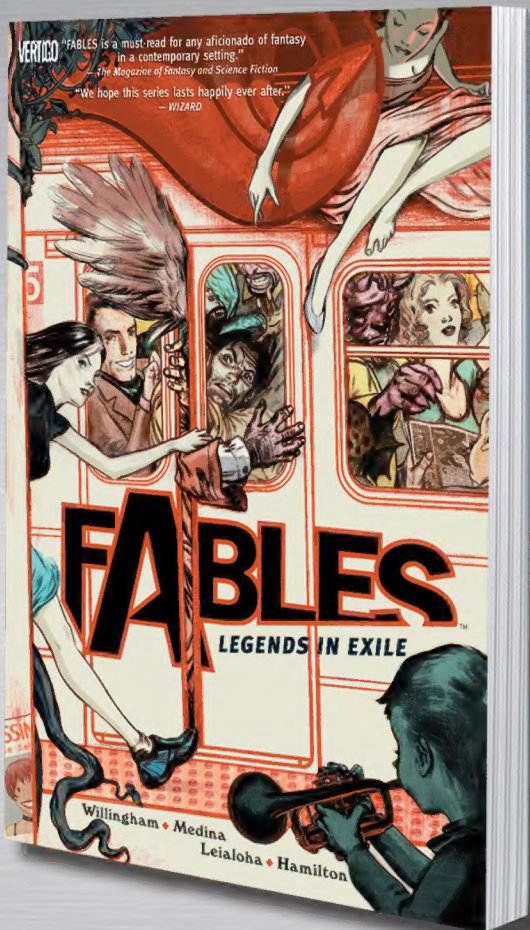
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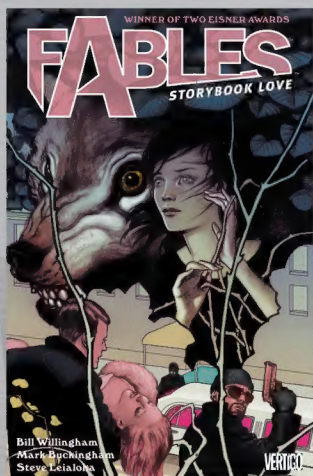
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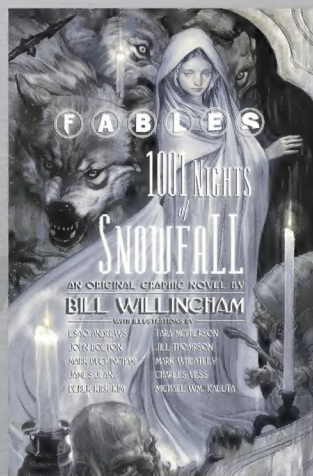
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